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TAGS: [PROP](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [HK](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: HONG KONG MEDIA REPORTS UNITED STATES "BLACK HAND"
INTERFERES IN HK

Classified By: Acting Consul General Christopher J. Marut for reasons 1
.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Hong Kong media coverage of a series of articles by Shanghai Fudan University scholars is but the latest in a long-running history of accusing the U.S. government, through the Consulate General, of interfering in Hong Kong's affairs. The usual allegations are that the USG, in league with its allies, proxies, and agents among the pan-democratic movement, seeks to destabilize Hong Kong and/or use it as an advance base to foment a "color revolution" on the Mainland. While well-placed Hong Kong-based journalists dismiss the credibility of such reporting, they nevertheless see coverage of Mainland views critical of the United States as reflecting a long-term trend of entities with commercial ties to the Mainland acquiring controlling interests in prominent Hong Kong media outlets. End Summary.

Hong Kong Media Pick Up Fudan "Study"

12. (SBU) Hong Kong's Sing Pao Daily News reported September 9 on a series of articles by Shanghai Fudan University scholars Ni Shixiong and Shen Benqiu alleging U.S. interference in Hong Kong and stressing the need for China to ensure that Chinese "patriots" continue to rule the Special Administrative Region. Ni, a former Director of Fudan's Center for American Studies (founded in part with a grant from the U.S. government), alleges that the United States interfered in Hong Kong's 2008 Legislative Council (LegCo) elections and plans to support opposition parties in the 2012 and 2016 elections. While nominally independent, Sing Pao (circ. 30,000) is known for leaning pro-Government/pro-Beijing. Of greater concern was respected centrist Ming Pao Daily News' (circulation 90,000) picking up the story, noting that the studies claim the United States seeks to promote a "color revolution in Hong Kong." The articles were also reported in the Singapore media. On the Mainland, we understand monthly "Party Life" meetings of local Communist Party branch members have reportedly featured discussion of the Fudan articles.

Journalists Dismiss Coverage, Lament Bias toward Mainland

13. (C) In a September 10 lunch with our Public Affairs Section, board members of the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) dismissed Sing Pao's coverage of the study, calling the paper a "government gazette mouthpiece." In addition, members of the board assessed that Hong Kong media coverage of the United States has become more negative as Hong Kong-based commercial interests "with an eye on the Mainland market" had taken over key properties. The HKJA members singled out Chinese-language Sing Tao Daily (circulation 40,000) and its sister publication The Standard

(circulation 35,000), both of which are now controlled by wealthy Hong Kong businessman Charles Ho. An HKJA officer said only half-jokingly that Sing Tao,s past references to "Communist Bandits" (gong fei) had now been replaced by the U.S. "black hand," as the paper curried favor with the Mainland.

¶4. (SBU) In a separate September 9 Consulate General representational dinner, an executive at Hong Kong-based Mandarin language broadcaster Phoenix TV told us that China Telecom had taken a 10 percent stake in the company, which he claimed now has 300 million viewers on the Mainland. (Note: We understand a more realistic estimate is 150 million, with millions more in other countries. End Note) The executive asserted, however, that the investment had not impacted Phoenix,s independence and was designed to facilitate content delivery over mobile platforms.

Comment

¶5. (C) Thirteen years after Hong Kong,s return to Chinese sovereignty, the press here remains free of official interference, but concern over censorship and self-censorship is growing, especially on sensitive political issues, like Hong Kong's democratic development and key Mainland political concerns. HKJA and other human rights observers contend major media organizations owned by large corporations may respond to their publishers' commercial interests on the Mainland by toning down criticism of the PRC and its views. The most recent run of articles on the U.S. "black hand" may

HONG KONG 00001792 002 OF 002

also reflect a belief that the United States is in league with local democracy activists to foment instability during the coming debate on constitutional reform. That Ming Pao ran the story is particularly troubling, since its tone is counter to the norm of serious reporting and thoughtful commentary for which the paper is known.
MARUT